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Instead of Managerialism: From What Goes on Inside Our Heads to What Our Heads (and Bodies) Go on Inside of – the World between Us

John Shotter

Review Essay
Theodore Taptiklis: Unmanaging: Opening up the Organization to its own Unspoken Knowledge

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Theodore Taptiklis is a former McKinsey & Company consultant who, over the course of a 40 year career in business and organizations, undertook a wide variety of roles, including board member, senior executive, strategist and change manager, business development manager, and worked also in a variety of line-management positions as both an employee and as a professional advisor. He characterizes his professional life during that time as a progression from, not only a position of arrogant certainty to one of increasing ignorance, but also as one from realizing the all-consuming pervasiveness and insidiousness of traditional management doctrine (*managerialism*) to the possibility of more authentic and liberating ways of experiencing organizational life. The starting point for this process of 'unmanaging' ourselves, he suggests, is what we can *notice* each moment in our experience of the activities occurring between us in our everyday lives – a move from understanding our own practices as outside observers of them to engaged participants within them.

Key words: managerialism, utterances, responsiveness, systems thinking, life events

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> "What is happening now has significance – in these surroundings. The surroundings give it its importance" (Wittgenstein, 1953, no. 583).
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> "Giving grounds, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; – but the end is not in certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game" (Wittgenstein, 1969, no. 204).

This, I think, is a quite marvellous book. It is precisely about what it says it is about in its subtitle: opening up organizations to their own unspoken knowledge. What I think Taptiklis has realized is, that although many of our activities in the world are already *partially* ordered, it is open to us to *further specify* them, i.e., to order their structure further, in a timely manner, to fit the particular exigencies of local circumstances. In other words, those who are good at organizing do not, and cannot, simply follow rules or procedures; they do not, and cannot, simply repeat in the present moment what was successful in the past. They must work within the complexities of the present moment for yet "another first time" (Garfinkel, 1967, p.9) in a way sensitive to the potentialities, the uniquely available local resources, to fashion appropriate lines of action. Thus he explores in this book the kinds of capabilities we require if we are going to organize our activities in this much more responsive-to-local-circumstances fashion, to organize in ways that make much more use of often *unspoken* and thus unnoticed local knowledges.

The book is in three parts. It is about (1) the whole original background of theoretical and philosophical thought from out of which *managerialism* as such, i.e., the idea that *all* organizations can be run and understood in the same way, has arisen; (2) the severe limitations of that background; and (3) what a very different way of thinking about ourselves and our relations both to each other and to the larger surroundings of our lives might look like, sound like, and feel like. But instead of proposing yet another new *theory* or *model*, Taptiklis takes instead our mostly unthinking, spontaneously enacted, mostly *speech intertwined*, *everyday activities* as the background surrounding from out of which all our activities arise and make sense, and back into which they return to exert their influence.

In other words, Taptiklis focuses on the importance of the fact that, as living, active, embodied human beings, we are continuously moving around and

spontaneously responding to the others and othernesses around us. We cannot not be doing it; it is unavoidable; we spend all waking, our non-organizational lives doing it in such activities. As a result of this informal, unorganized activity, often derided (because of its unreflective and untutored nature), when we turn to thinking of theories or models, "our minds and bodies," Taptiklis remarks, "are already attuned to 'finding our way about' through listening and reflecting and responding to the voices [and other expressive bodily movements, let me add – js] of those around us" (p. 208). It is what we are already "attuned to" (or can become attuned to as a result of our further practical encounters with events in our more professional surroundings) that Taptiklis sees as the "unspoken knowledge" that can be opened up within the "navigable orality" that he explores in the latter part of his book. Indeed, the focus on lived, voiced utterances (and not on PowerPoint slides – see later) is deliberate, for, as he sees it, the theories and models that we have explored in the past provided not only a very reduced version of these potentials, but also a version of them that eradicates their *relational* and thus their *affective* nature. We need to move from the position of outside observers to engaged participants if we are to fully understand how the knowledge or knowing of which he speaks can move us and change us in our very way(s) of being in the world.

The aim of the book is ambitious indeed. The adoption of what he is advocating, he claims, "has the potential to change everything, from the way we talk to the shape of our lives at work and beyond" (p. 2). The meaning of '*Un-'* in the title thus has, as he sees it, two major meanings: (1) One is that organizing *happens* as a result of "the spontaneous, the organic, the bottom-up activity that 'emerges' from within a situation, in contrast to mainstream, instrumental management practices that are imposed from the top of the organization or from outside it" (p. 4); and (2) the other is that "... we will not realize the real collaborative potential that lies between us unless we make the conscious effort to free ourselves from the ever-thickening undergrowth of management doctrine. Managerialism has now become so rampant, so invasive in its practices, so convinced of its preeminence, so all-consuming in its lust for attention, that it fills the days and the nights of practitioners and managers alike in organizations around the world, with its unending require-

ments for measurement, assessment, evaluation, report-writing and presentation" (p. 4).

What has made managerialism so pervasive, of course, is that its practitioners believe that organisations are much more similar than dissimilar to each other, thus there is little difference in the skills required to run a supermarket, a healthcare organization, a college, an advertising agency, an engineering factory, or an oil rig. Indeed, the experience and skills relevant to a particular organisation's front-line, or shop-floor activities are so secondary that all management activities can best be understood in terms of generic, one-size-fits-all theories and skills.

This is something that Taptiklis can describe from his own personal experience, for he is a former McKinsey & Company consultant and seasoned organizational practitioner who has operated in many roles in the course of 40 year career in business settings, including board member, senior executive, strategist and change manager, business development manager, and also in a variety of line-management positions, working both as an employee and as a professional advisor. Indeed, he has worked in something like 25 organizations from manufacturing to financial services to transportation, utility management, healthcare and social services. But for the past 10 years he has operated in a private capacity seeking to realize in practice the new ways he outlines in this book in a number of different professional communities. Thus this book is his story of a "paradise lost" (as he slowly begins to see through his 'dream job' at McKinsey & Company), of the possibility of a "(different) paradise regained," and of his beginning attempts to regain it.

After the initial glamour of joining McKinsey & Company, of becoming a member of an "unmistakably privileged elite," he remarks that during his six year tenure there, that: "Slowly I began to discern a harsher, more brutal reality behind the idealized facade. Eventually, I fell out of love with this reality, and very much later, with the ideal as well" (p. 2) – the ideal, now massively prevalent in our Western culture at the moment, is of course that drawn from the now almost unquestionable assumption that the only proper form of knowledge upon which to base our actions is that arrived at by the experimental scientist, a person who has tested and gained evidence in sup-

port of his or her proposed *theories* in the pure conditions of a laboratory environment.

In the first part of the book: *Part I: Things Fall Apart*, he recounts his own organizational experiences in relation to developments in management thinking in the years between 1975 and 2005. Brought up, like so many of us in the idealization of *scientific* forms of knowledge, he at first embraced with some pride the "'fact-based' analysis" (p. 13): a process that began with an "issue analysis" as first major step in a "carefully defined process of 'problem solving'" (p. 13); which was then decomposed into a pyramid structure of 'issues', with an answer to the question, "so what?" at its pinnacle; and which ended in the production of "authoritative-looking" documents (printed reports or presentation slide-packs) with "a distinctive, carefully designed typography and page layout style" (p. 15). Ten years later, he remarks, this style was incorporated into the early software versions of what is now ubiquitous as PowerPoint – which, as he now sees it, "has mutated into a method and style of organization interaction that promotes formulaic thinking and mechanical expression and discourages participation and dialogue. Its very title now emphasizes the top-down, didactic orientation of its promoters" (p. 55).

Ethically undisturbed in the self-belief that this was all in the service of the neutral and dispassionate pursuit of truth, Taptiklis applied himself diligently to gaining the requisite skills. But, as he now remarks: "Looking back, I'm surprised by how incurious we were about the ordinary life of our client organizations. We spent little time in any kind of observation or participatory activity... Our stance was, of course, that we stood outside the client organization" (p. 16) – an intrinsic aspect of managerialism as outlined above. And it is this recognition, that those who *stand outside* an organization miss certain understandings that are only available to those *on the inside*, that permeates the rest of what Taptiklis has to say in this book.

Indeed, as he turns in this first part to critiques of Tom Peters, Peter Senge, and John Seeley Brown, this is his main critical tool. Despite the challenges they presented to the then orthodoxy, the final outcome of their challenges was to leave the desire for general, decontextualized concepts, theories, models, of precepts, untouched. For instance, although Tom Peters

brought the living details of organization life into view as a new topic of analysis, the result was the so-called "7-S" model, of *hard*-S's (strategy, structure, and systems) and of *soft*-S's (style, staff, skills, and shared values). Indeed, as Taptiklis remarks, all these enormously popular innovators still saw the task of 'system design' as something still to be done by outsiders, by someone who stands outside "the experiment, and observes and monitors its outcome" (p. 54). Each new *noticing* of important details, of the particularities of organizational workings, resulted in statements depicting generalities. So that even now he notes, in commenting on the *Harvard Business Review* (2005) Manager's Toolkit, that it "seems virtually identical to the training I received in management orthodoxy in 1975" (p. 60) – instrumentality still rules, OK?

In 1994 things began to change. The Life Insurance Mutual Society in which he was an executive was running into trouble, the demand for life insurance was declining, for the risk of single catastrophic life-events had been greatly reduced. It has been forgotten that the 150-year old assumption built into the Mutual Society was an assumption. It was decided to commission a large-scale qualitative research study of the life-course of (ultimately 1,700) New Zealanders. "The results were astonishing," he remarks, "and their implications altered the course of my subsequent life" (p. 63). The results that began to emerge, as he summarizes them, were that: (1) although lives are unique, there were common patterns; (2) people tell of their lives in terms of "life events;" (3) in the grip of a life event we feel like a different person; (4) life events impel us to do things; (5) and we rationalize our actions afterwards; (6) we cannot prepare for life events; (7) but when they occur, they colonize our attention; (8) work-life is inseparable from personal life; (9) life events open up possibilities; (10) but during their occurrence we find very little help (especially in the self-help literature) in dealing with them; (11) little from others, we depend on ourselves; (12) in so doing, our lives acquire a trajectory, a "felt sense of direction and movement" (p. 69). "I suddenly saw my work in a life insurance mutual in a new perspective... Right there in front of me a much more immediate and visceral need. There must be a way that people could find for themselves how to navigate through life's complexities and make sense of things for themselves" (p. 70).

But what might be involved in helping people to find that *way*, what might Taptiklis do that would not result in yet another account *from the outside* in terms of general concepts provided by so-called authorities, what might help people make *their own sense* of *their own* lives?

In *Part II: Voices at the Brink*, Taptiklis critically outlines – in contrast to the work of Peters, Senge, and Seely Brown – the work of those whom he thinks are a help in this task, those who are beginning to inquire into what our activities look like, sound like, and feel like *from inside* our conduct of them. As all the people he draws upon are fairly well-known, I will not say very much about them, except to try to bring out their relevance to Taptiklis's project. He pairs each one with a somewhat more well-known writer from whom they have drawn inspiration. The first pair are Patricia Benner and Hubert Dreyfus: *Work as an Immersive Practice*. Benner's 1984 book, *From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Nursing Practice*, is well-known by those in nursing circles. She has been influenced by Dreyfus and Dreyfus' (1986) 5-stage account of the transition from novice, through advanced beginner, to being competent, then proficient, and finally to being an expert – the movement from a detached, unfeeling thinker to an emotionally involved performer, from cognitive to embodied perceptual skills.

Taptiklis draws from her the importance of nurses being immersed in a practice over some long time, and the importance in this experience giving rise to "learning pivots," to paradigm events upon which, as one becomes more emotionally involved in one's practice, one begins, not so much to analyse as to mediate upon both them and the possibilities surrounding them in a much more explorative manner. Life events such as these, as we shall see, will play a central part in his Storymaker project, as I will outline later. He also notes Benner's challenge to Maslow's individualistic hierarchy of needs, that currently goes largely unchallenged in MBA courses around the world. For, as she sees it, rather than self-actualization, it is our need to *care* that is fundamental: "Caring sets up the condition that something or someone outside the person matters and creates personal concerns. Without caring, the person would be without projects and concerns" (Benner and Wrubel, 1989).

I have spent some time on Benner's work as it has been an influence in Taptiklis's projects from the beginning and is still pervasive. I will treat the others he currently draws from more briefly.

He next discusses my own work (Shotter, 1984, 1993, and in press), and my relations to Wittgenstein's work, under the title: *Feeling Forward, Responding in the Moment*. Centrally, he sees me, quite correctly, as reacting to the 'stripped-down', atomistic, Cartesian view of ourselves and our world that stands in the way of our articulating a much richer, more *relational* and *dialogical* account of ourselves, as living out our lives from within a ceaselessly changing, unremittingly dynamic, involvement with the others and othernesses around us. As with Benner's "learning pivots," he highlights the emphasis I also place in my work on "striking moments," and the use of "living vignettes" (when faced by a bewildering experience) that enable us to "get it," to see the bewildering experience in the right light, so to speak (Shotter, in press) – for such vignettes can, by their portrayal of certain events, arouse an orientation within us, a way of relating ourselves to an experience in such a way that we can 'feel forward' within it, sense the next possible steps that we might take.

He then moves on to David Boje and Bakhtin: *The Movement of the Living Story*. Central here is Boje's (1991) account of stories in organizations acting as "touchstones," as defining moments in which everyone in an organization shares, such that even a fragment of the story – what Boje calls the *ante*(before)-narrative, someone saying: "you know the story when..." – can produce a "'feeling forward' process of exploration and sense-making" (p. 112). Indeed, if one tries to do more than that and tries to construct *the* whole, coherent narrative of the complex, multidimensional life of a living organization, then one has returned once again to the instrumentalist's delusional dream of a "lust-for-control narrative," a dream that both Boje and Taptiklis see as leading to a "narrative prison." It is to Bakhtin (1965) and his work on Rabelais and the notion of Carnival that Boje looks for our liberation from these delusional dreams, for as Bakhtin sees it: Carnival provides participatory moments, blending the roles of actor and observer; it values the openness and unfinalizability of meaning; and it is transgressive, in that it calls estab-

lished assumptions and routines into question – all of which are needed (*sometimes*, I must add), if organizations are to be truly innovative.

Finally, Taptiklis turns to the works of Ralph Stacey and Norbert Elias: *Together in the Past and the Future of the Now.* Here it is the contrast between "systems thinking" and "responsive process theory" that he wants to emphasize. As Stacey (2007) outlines it, much of what he calls "systems thinking" works in terms of systems composed, not of unique living beings all different from each other, but in terms of self-contained elements all identical to each other, for instance, *molecules* in Prigogine and Stenger's (1984) account. They describe the ordering that can be observed in *dissipative structures in far from equilibrium conditions* thus: "At equilibrium *molecules* behave as essentially independent entities; they ignore one another. We would like to call them 'hynons', 'sleep-walkers'... However, nonequilbrium wakes them up and introduces a coherence quite foreign to equilibrium" (pp.180-181, my emphasis), and when this happens, they all begin to behave as if they were each 'informed' about the overall state of the system.

Now it is not that Prigogine and Stengers (and other systems thinkers) are wrong about this. But it is still a generalized, one-size-fits-all view of organizing activities *from the outside*, a view in which a system is seen as self-contained entity, as a container for those within it, and also as occupying a place within an "external environment." From the inside, to participant human beings, however, things look different, sound different, and feel different. This is where Elias' (2000) account of the *civilizing process* becomes relevant, for in his account, rather than 'society' being seen as something external to us, as a container for the individuals we are in ourselves, he sees it as emerging spontaneously *between us all* in the myriad of interactions occurring between us all, all the time. We are 'of' it just as much as we are 'in' it, and it is this that Ralph Stacey emphasizes in "responsive process theory."

All these practitioners and thinkers, Taptiklis suggests, encourage us to "move beyond the distracting fantasies, idealizations and isolating tendencies of our past, to seize and take advantage of the depth and breath of the connections between us" (p. 131). But this is not easy. Idealizations (purifications, simplifications) of phenomena, thought to be too complex and too disorderly

to grasp intellectually, have been central to many of our greatest scientific achievements, to our discovery of a *hidden order behind appearances* – for we have long assumed that there is no order to be discovered *in* appearances, *within* the everyday events occurring around us. Indeed, it is only recently in the 17th century that Galileo wrote: "mobile... mente concipio omni secluso impedimento" (I think in my mind of something moveable that is left entirely to itself), and began the whole tradition of thought in which we deal, not with things and doings *in themselves*, but with our own (symbolic, mostly linguistic) *representations* of them – a move which allowed Galileo to begin, what had not been possible before, to apply mathematics and measurement to motion. But it is just this move that stands us *outside* the phenomena of our concern, that relates us to the events happening around us only *cognitively* – in terms of what 'I think in my mind' – and leads to ignore what we *sense* or *feel* as embodied beings living out of lives in relation to all the others around us. For, as Taptiklis notes, these modes of reasoning, ways of thinking, "become absorbed into the unconscious and form a kind of 'second nature (what Elias called *habitus*)... [and] once the new thinking becomes 'second nature' or *habitus* we can no longer recognize how it is (or was) to think in the old way" (p. 132).

However, our habits of (rational) thought are one thing, and our actual practices on the ground of everyday life, in which we interact with each other in moderately direct and spontaneous ways, are quite another. There we *can* – if we know how to orient ourselves appropriately – begin to recognize what it is like (or was like) to think in the old way, to think as a participant *from within* the doing of an activity, *from within* the doing of a practice. It is our acting – what we are in fact already doing in our everyday lives together – not our thinking in seminar rooms and conference halls, can that provide us with the beginnings we need to fashion the new ways of thinking and talking we require if we are to investigate in a more disciplined manner the unspoken knowledge(s) of which Taptiklis speaks. But our acting must come first, and our thinking, or reflecting, be situated within it. Taptiklis' Storymaker project is an exploration of how understandings of significant life events, or 'learning pivots' as Benner calls them, can be expressed (not represented) in ways that in fact promote a certain kind of practical learning. They can work to *reorient*

those currently troubled by a particular experience or cicumstance so that they come to see it, hear it, and feel it in a new way, thus to open them up to noticing within it previously unnoticed ways forward – it is to this project that I now want to turn.

Taptiklis outlines in *Part III: Linking Voices, Making Sense, Joining Lives*, some of the already occurring steps towards the new ways of acting that he and others are developing. He begins with his own *Storymaker Project* in New Zealand. In 2002, he was asked to consult to an engineering company which had been through a number of major changes in the previous 15 years, as a result of which they had lost a significant number of experienced people during that time, and was now in trouble. There was a feeling that the company had also lost *something else*, a valuable kind of knowledge or capability that was elusive, difficult to articulate. The senior team had decided that it was important to discover what had been lost, or at least to make a serious effort (what kind of effort?) to retain what was left. Taptiklis decided to conduct a series of reflective conversations with long-serving managers, and to examine the recorded material collected for *fragments* that might – see Benner and Shotter above for their attention to "learning pivots" and "striking moments" – help those in the company both to gain (and to retain!) a sense of that elusive kind of previously unspoken knowledge that had in fact been at work in *organizing* their organization, as a result of listening to them. Later, in 2004, Taptiklis conducted a similar project with a team of experienced social workers developing a new approach to child protection. The aim here was to focus on the gritty detail of front-line work and to try to distil – in this hard-to-observe domain – practical lessons from everyday working experiences.

His approach in both these spheres was the same, it started with a question: "What if you could find just that fragment of another's life that would help you decide what to do for yourself, just when you needed it?" (p. 145), and on the importance of people's spoken voice in telling of these *life events*. I cannot emphasize the importance of this strongly enough. In our spoken *utterances* we *can* do much, much more than provide *representations* of states of affairs in the world. In the *expressive voicing* of our utterances we can arouse in our listeners *felt movements*, movements that can create within

them a felt anticipation of a something more yet to come, but also, in their very incompleteness, in their openness to the future, a motivation to utter their own rejoinder to what we say (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986). We don't easily arouse such felt movements in others in our technical talk, in our talk of facts, in merely giving information; but when we talk of events that matter to us in our lives, when we re-call the felt contours of our lived experiences to mind and try accurately to fit our talk to their 'shape', then our talk can also be very moving to others.

But to talk of a life event, fluently, for a first time, is not easy. People need not only to fit the right words to the feeling shape of their experience, they need to find the right words for their listeners too. It is a struggle. Yet strangely, as Taptiklis remarks, the lack of fluency is important. Indeed, "the less structured and more spontaneous, the more directly they seem to communicate. In their hesitations and uncertainties, as people reflect on something for what may be the very first time, are the gaps that enable the listener to make an imaginative connection and relate themselves to what they hear. It is such 'feeling forward' narratives that have so far evoked the most powerful audience response" (p. 151). This, in itself is an important finding. To return to Taptiklis' remarks earlier on the emphasis in McKinsey & Company on authoritative-looking slide-packs and the later use of PowerPoint, it is the gaps in our expressions that enable listeners to relate themselves to our utterances and to make imaginative connections to what they hear us say. It is the use *they* can make of them that is important if they are to learn anything of *use to them*. While something drawing on already well-known knowledge, old knowledge, can be communicated in terms of statements on slides, new knowledge – knowledge that arouses a *new meaning* for people in their everyday lives together – emerges spontaneously in our encounters, and lives in the space between us at the moment of our connection.

Indeed, after Taptiklis' discovery of the usefulness of a person's *telling* of life events to another, is another discovery: that if the recording of the telling is played and listened to again, people begin further to notice aspects of a person's utterances that are there, and do in fact affect us, but are usually unnoticed. It is "these aspects of speech," Taptiklis remarks, following Bakhtin (1986), "are clues to the speaker's active responsive relationship

with his world, that forms and is formed by the utterance" (p. 154). And with repeated playing and listening again, yet more aspects become visible-for-reflection, so to speak. Why I speak of this as a 'discovery' is because we often say things like: "I just had an intuition he wasn't telling me the whole truth, that he was holding something back," and what Taptiklis is doing here is to pinpoint the 'evidence' upon which such 'intuitions' are based. As Wittgenstein (1953) noted: "It is certainly possible to be convinced by evidence that someone is in such-and-such a state of mind, that, for instance, he is not pretending. But 'evidence' here includes 'imponderable' evidence. The question is: what does imponderable evidence accomplish?" (p. 288). Taptiklis has discovered, then, what this usually imponderable evidence accomplishes, and that such *tellings* (and the *noticings* they can arouse) can be of great importance in teaching the practical wisdom accumulated by those with many years of experience to those with less experiences to draw on.

To describe in more detail the extent of Taptiklis' Storymaker project would completely overstep the bounds of this already overlong review essay, but it is important for me to emphasize his focus on people's actual spoken, living utterances – and that various styles of writing (and of necessity his book contains many transcripts) can also, if read with the voicing of the original utterance in mind, arouse a similar movement in a reader as in a listener (Shotter, 2006). But it is in the living movement of the voice that the original influences shaping our conduction are exerted.

Taptiklis locates another new beginning in the work of Patricia Shaw (2002) in her book *Changing Conversations in Organizations*. Currently, we feel that what counts in a conversation is what eventuates, its outcome, its product. Patricia Shaw inverts this, what matters as she sees it are the encounters themselves and what is explored and discovered within them as they unfold. "For Shaw,' says Taptiklis, "the reality of organizational life is what happens between us – how we are finding ways to go on together – in the present moment" (p. 189), for it is in these moments that we are *doing organizing*. Thus, says Shaw (2002), our conversations are "... not 'just talking'. We are acting together to shape ourselves and our world" (Shaw, 2002, p.41). In other words, we are involved in an activity in which we are constructing not only a particular kind of orientation toward an open-ended future, but also

at the same time constructing ourselves as a particular kind of person, as one who knows at least how to begin to act in such a new world.

At this point, I am reminded of an issue that came to light for me long ago as I began to investigate alternatives to our peculiar, Western notion of personhood, ourselves as *set over against* the others and othernesses around us (Geertz, 1983): For in the West we have verbs in both active and passive voice, but no middle voice – where 'voice' is to do with the relationship between the action (or state) that a verb expresses and the participants in the action expressed in terms of the subject, object, etc. of a sentence. "In the active [voice]," as Benveniste (1971) puts it, "the verbs denote a process that is accomplished *outside the subject*. In the middle..., the verb indicates a process centring in the subject, *the subject being inside the process*" (p. 148, my emphases). Indeed, both our active and passive voice verb forms not only separate actors and their actions, but also separate thought from action, and thus make the description of the *identity changing* activities Shaw describes difficult indeed – they are made to seem almost mystical.

Taptiklis also connects with precisely this difficulty in capturing such phenomena in discussing the skill of *noticing*, and distinguishing it from observing: "Observation means seeing oneself as standing outside the situation and looking in on it, to measure it, describe it, or produce a representation of it. Noticing, on the other hand, implicates the noticer, '*I* noticed that he was there', we might say. The skill we are talking about here is the skill of connecting onself to one's surroundings and one's colleagues through the action of noticing" (p. 202) – again, this is clearly a middle voice activity, in which the agent of the action is *inside* and affected by the very action he or she is executing, but, as he says, it is "a skill that lies beyond the purview of present-day education and training" (pp. 201-202).

Conclusions

In the course, then, of an accessibly told life's narrative, Taptiklis tells of his gradual turning away from practising the prestigious skills involved in "fact-based" analyses, and of his gradual turning towards seeing our everyday ways of making sense to, and with each other and to the importance of our

telling things to each other, as of crucial importance. He now thinks that: "Organizational strategy can and should be simply a matter of mobilizing the resources that we already have available to us. All of the influences that matter to us – our customers, our suppliers, our competitors, our regulatory authorities, our sources of funding, the resources of technology and human capability that are available to us – all of these are comprehensible through the daily connections we have with them through the ordinary work of the enterprise and its practitioners" (p. 213).

But the importance of Taptiklis' book lies hardly at all in this conclusion, but in all the steps that he outlines in the journey he took on the way towards reaching it, the journey he calls un-managing ourselves, ridding ourselves of the hubristic managerialist belief that an individual manager (or senior team of managers) can *impose* an order upon a group of fellow human beings. As he outlined at the beginning of this book, but about which we can now, perhaps, be a little more clear, organizing is not something that individuals can do alone, wilfully, by putting plans or strategies into action; organizing is something that *happens* between us in our spontaneous responses to our surrounding circumstances, it emerges from within our immersion (or as we become immersed) as participant agencies in already ongoing activities.

To accept that organizing cannot be *done* just as and when we want to do it, and also that it can only emerge out of what we are already participating in, is doubly hard for us. We are so used – as Descartes put it in 1637 when he felt the need to overcome the beliefs and prejudices of his times – to "starting again with a clean slate." And a new start can only be truly *rational*, we feel, if it ignores or demolishes all that was there before it and starts again from scratch. Hence our reluctance to begin *from within the midst* of where we currently *are*. Indeed, to some, it might seem that Taptiklis is advocating taking on the beliefs and prejudices, the already existing (but still inadequate) ideas, theories, and knowledges of those around us, just what Descartes wanted to avoid. But this is not what Taptiklis is advocating at all.

In emphasizing the importance of experienced people's *tellings* of life events, unique to who they are and to who they have become, he is doing at least these two important things: (1) the concrete, particular, and uniquely detailed nature of such tellings, in which people recall their own unique

relations to events and things happening in their surroundings, leaves very little room for the expression of beliefs, general opinions, or for prejudices; and (2) although the expressions they provide are of *unique experiences*, in their telling they are expressed in utterances (in wordings) that can 'touch' us all, and in which, so to speak, we can 'see ourselves'. Thus, it is the importance of such *tellings*, and the *noticings* that they can arouse, that Taptiklis can claim as his major findings; and these findings are ones which, I think, are of great importance to all those of us who, as practitioners, are concerned to pick out from within the midst of complexity possibly innovative openings into which to act.

So let me now try to bring this lengthy review to a close by listing in summary form what seems to me to be some of the understandings that emerge from reading this book:

– There is something very special in the understandings we have of events in the human realm, we know things from within our involvements with each other that cannot be known in any other way;
– no matter what we say our ideas or principles are in this realm, it is in our practices that we show the meanings of what we say we know and believe: "... we can see from their actions that they believe certain things definitely, whether they express this belief or not" (Wittgenstein, 1969, no. 284);
– it is from within our immersion within such a realm, within such surroundings, that we come to learn all kinds of things and skills without the need for any explicit teaching;
– this realm of inter-activity is already partially ordered;
– but it is open to us to further specify its ordering, its organization, in different ways in different regions;
– idealizations, utopian dreams are not where to start such moves at further specification;
– they strip out the 'moving' aspects of our expressions and leave only
– our sense of 'something being not quite right' is an acute indicator of a possible beginning, a sense of disquiet;

- we need to immerse ourselves in the trouble, first to find our 'way around' within it, and then to find a way 'to go on' from within it;
- other people's experiences can be helpful to us in this, we can 'see ourselves' in recollections;
- people know their own life in terms of life events that have moved, struck, or touched them, these are the events that have made a difference to them that matters to them in their lives;
- their oral telling is important as it can be 'moving', i.e., an influence of our way of being-in-the-world;
- the power of vignettes, of fragments that leave gaps that listeners fill in with their own connections to what they hear;
- not only tellings but noticings are important, developing a certain a way of being-in-the-world is required;
- it is in the power of the human voice, of our living relations to each other, that this knowledge can exert its influence;
- the elusive nature of this knowledge; it cannot be represented, but it can be given poetic expression;
- even theories and talk of models can sometimes work like the telling of a life event, then the effect of such a telling is perceptual (to do with our noticing), not cognitive (to do with our thinking);
- in their situated enactment, practices are specifically themselves and not representative of something else;
- the attempt to bring unexplicated specific details to light by the use of generic schematisms loses the phenomena they are meant to reveal;
- each step in a practice arouses in the bodies of participants a living tendency that can guide them towards taking their next step;
- these bodily 'feels' are elusive, but they can be discovered in a practice, and can be aroused in the utterance of a vignette, but they cannot be just imagined as and when desired;
- such understandings cannot be set out in theories, laws, principles, rules, models, recipes, protocols, etc.;

– these understandings need to be expressed, not as objects but as methods, as ways of doing something;

– in other words, they are teachable within practices.

In this, Taptiklis echoes in almost every detail the disquiets set out nearly 20 years ago by Stephen Toulmin (1990) in his account of his "change of mind" (p. 2) as he chronicled his worries that: "What looked in the 19th century like an irresistible river has disappeared in the sand, and we now seem to have run aground... The very project of Modernity thus seems to have lost momentum, and we need to fashion a successor program" (p. 3). The successor program Toulmin outlined in his discussion of *The Recovery of Practical Philosophy* – which included: *the return to the oral* (with a displacement of mediating propositions); *the return to the particular* (away from abstract universals); *the return to the local* (no longer ignoring already existing traditions and 'forms of life'); and *the return to the timely* (away from the dream of something being 'true for all time') – is paralleled in an almost uncanny fashion by Taptiklis in his steps towards unmanaging his now new approach to management.

Toulmin (1990) talks of the need to move to "realistic and reasonable 'horizons of expectation'" (p. 3) if we are to refashion for ourselves the project of Modernity. We need, Toulmin suggests, and Taptiklis too, to stop asking ourselves questions phrased in universal, timeless, decontexualized terms, for such questions are unanswerable, their terms have no determinate meanings, thus the answers they receive have no clearly determinable *use*. The 12-step lists, the protocols of best practice, and others 7-S-like schematisms that currently now hover over everyone's daily actions and interactions as "a vast superstructure of 'supposed to'" (p. 219), is leading, as Taptiklis claims, to "the loss of confidence by partitioners in themselves and in their own knowledge" (p. 219). For if, by definition, *proper knowledge* always comes *from outside* a practice – for all our modernist styles of thought are focussed on *The External World* (Russell, 1914) – then people's indigenous practices – the knowledges they have gained *from within* their immersion in their own professional practices – will remain unheralded, unrecorded, and unnoticed. But the new thinking Taptiklis draws on – from Bakhtin, Mead, Merleau-

Ponty, and Wittgenstein – takes us inside, not the subjective world, but the world between us (in which the sharp division between subject and object disappears). Within *this* world, as Taptiklis puts it, "clarity emerges from complexity, not from simplicity" (p. 205).

What Taptiklis provides us with, then, in this new book, is not with some new theory or model, or another 'tool-kit' or list of 'supposed to' things that all good managers need to remember, but an answer to Toulmin's (1990) question: "What intellectual *posture* should we adopt in confronting the future?" (p. 2) – except that Taptiklis would, I think, want to quibble with Toulmin's adjective 'intellectual' here, and want to say: "What *embodied skills and sensitivities* can we come to embody, and how can we come to embody them, in confronting the future?" For clearly, we cannot continue for much longer in simply implementing more of the same in the hope that, one day, we'll finally 'get it right'! We need to step back into and to understand the realm of our everyday doings together if we are to find the origins we need to begin to fashion a successor project to modernism; and it is from within our lives together that we can find the resources to do it. In this, I think, Taptiklis has made an exceptionally good start.

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